

## Discourse authority in the Sibundoy Valley\*

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### Abstract

There has been much speculation that verbal instruments of cosmology are less important in the Andes than in other settings. This paper identifies a central Andean cosmological principle, captured in various forms of the Quechua verbal root *camay*, which involves "instilling life force in some physical entity". In the ceremonial and ritual speech, and the mythic narratives, of the Sibundoy people of Andean Colombia, accomplished speakers use traditional speech forms linked to the example of the ancestors to claim authority for their speech. Two methods of accessing the ancestors are prevalent: referencing entails attributing speech to ancestral prototypes, while sampling entails the invocation of ancestral presence. In view of the prominence of Andean speech that is *camasca*, laden with cosmic resonance, this paper argues for a revision of the thesis that verbal instruments are of secondary importance in Andean societies.

**Key words:** cosmology, discourse, verbal art, the Andes.

\* An expanded version of a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, December 6, 1992.

## El discurso de la autoridad en el Valle de Sibundoy

### Resumen

Existe la idea de que los instrumentos verbales tienen menos importancia entre las poblaciones andinas que en otros ámbitos. Este ensayo identifica un concepto clave del pensamiento cosmológico andino, evidente en diferentes manifestaciones de la raíz quechua *camay*, que significa "introducir fuerza vital en algún objeto físico". En los discursos ceremoniales y rituales, y en los cuentos míticos, respetados hablantes de los pueblos sibundoyes de la región andina de Colombia, hacen uso de formas tradicionales, asociadas con el ejemplo de los antepasados, para sostener la autoridad de su discurso. Se ven dos maneras de asociarse con los antepasados: la de *referencing* postula un enlace con prototipos ancestrales, mientras la de *samplig* invoca la presencia de los antepasados. En vista de la importancia de las formas verbales andinas que son *camasca*, es decir, que están cargadas de resonancia cósmica, este texto presenta una revisión de la tesis según la cual estos instrumentos verbales tienen una importancia secundaria en la expresión cosmológica de las sociedades andinas.

**Palabras claves:** cosmovisión, discurso, literatura oral, Andes.

Among the original centers of high civilization, only the Incas failed to develop and deploy a writing system based on alphabetic script. The *quipu* bundles with their intricate webs of knotted strands could record tremendous stores of information, and although Gordon Brotherston (1992: 80) calls attention to them as a "literary medium," it seems that they did not reduce this information to particles in the manner of writing systems (Ascher and Ascher 1981). Ethnohistorical accounts, some of them admittedly rather fanciful, portray members of the Incan nobility as awestruck by the Spaniards' "speaking" papers (Harrison 1989: 56). The Inca Empire, in many ways a culmination of the civilizing process in the Andes, was built without use of a system of alphabetic script. Does this fact indicate a lack of emphasis on the verbal in Andean society?

Students of Andean cultures have noted the importance of non-verbal instruments in conveying basic principles of Andean cosmology. A recent anthology devoted to Andean cosmology describes manifestations of Andean cosmology in ritual, festival, waterworks, medicine, textiles, heraldry, *ayllu* activities as well as in language (Dover et al., 1992). In that volume, Tom Zuidema (1992: 17) argues that kinship and calendrical observations are "the two most important tools used by Andean polities for organizing their cosmological interests." Zuidema contrasts the relatively sparse Andean investment in verbal renderings of the cosmos with the florid verbal accounts reported for Mesoamerican and Amazonian peoples. In his introduction to the volume, Robert Dover (1992: 6) states that "Andean oral tradition...is not the principal arena for cosmological discourse."

Are we required, in view of these claims, to construe the Andean peoples as taciturn, being more prone to reveal themselves in material and political forms than in verbal expressions? Regina Harrison (1989: 72) suggests as much when she identifies the visual code as primary and the verbal code as secondary in Incaic society. But evidence of a significant role for verbal expression in the Andes surfaces in these very same sources, for example when Harrison (1989: 75-76) shows how Viracocha "speaks" things into existence, and when virtually every author in the anthology on cosmology stresses the significance of mythic narratives in constructing and reconstructing Andean cosmology. Andean myth may not describe an elaborate system of heavens and underworlds, nor even clearly distinguish the attributes and histories of the main deities, but it nonetheless provides an incessant Andean verbal commentary on the process of ethnogenesis in the Andes.

A charter for speech instruments in cosmos-building can be found in the second chapter of the famous *huarochiri* manuscript assembled at the turn of the seventeenth century by Quechua natives under the direction of Father Francisco Avila (Salomon and Urioste 1991). This chapter describes the actions of the trickster deity Cuni Raya Vira Cocha, who seduces a female deity and pursues her after she rejects him. Early in the chapter (Salomon and Urioste 1991: 46) the narrative attributes a remarkable power to this culture hero/deity: "Just by speaking he made the fields, and finished the terraces with walls of fine masonry." A footnote provides the equivalent of "supplied" for "made" in this passage, suggesting that the fields would be full of produce. Here a founding deity

of Incan civilization is said to possess the power to bring things into existence merely through the exercise of his voice.

Interestingly, a comparable episode appears in the mythology of the Sibundoy Valley in the Colombian Andes, a site that we will explore further in relation to discourse authority. In the Sibundoy episode, the owl-man lets forth a shout; as far as his voice carries the mountainside is transformed into cultivated fields of corn, beans, and squash, ready to be harvested (see McDowell 1994). The owl-man has arrived as a suitor at the home of a young woman, but his uncouth manner and appearance lead to his rejection at the hands of her family. The owl-man is perceived to be a powerful doctor whose knowledge could have greatly improved our mortal destiny. Indeed, if the work of crop cultivation could be accomplished by vocal command, life would be easier by far. This tale fits into a Sibundoy mythical pattern of paradise forestalled in the effort to contain and channel the rampant spiritual fluidity of the ancestral period.

With Cuni Raya Vira Cocha of the South-Central Andes and the owl-man of the Sibundoy Valley we have important precedents to take speech seriously as an Andean instrument of cosmological process. Let's return briefly to the *huarochiri* account, which contains an element that may prove useful in developing our theme. The Quechua text for the phrase, "Just by speaking he made the fields..." is *camarcan chacratapas rimaspallas* (Salomon and Urioste 1991: 158). It is interesting to encounter a conjugation of the verb *camay* here (in past tense, third-person singular form). A number of commentators have identified this root and its several derivations as central to Andean thinking (Gonzalez Holguin [1608] 1952; Garcilaso de la Vega [1609, 1617] 1966; Taylor 1974-76; Harrison 1989; Salomon and Urioste 1991). Perhaps the most celebrated form of this key semantic complex is the one present in *Pacha Camac*, animator of the universe, a major deity in the Quechuan pantheon. The verbal root connotes *instilling life force in some physical entity*. Its nominal forms expand upon this key notion of a life-imbuing function: *camac*, the agentive form, which Garcilaso identifies as the primary form, is a "vitalizing prototype" (Salomon and Urioste 1991: 16); *camasca*, a past participial form indicating the result of a completed action, is the word commonly used to denote native healers (see Cobo [1653] 1990); and *camayoc*, an agent possessor, indicates a "lord" or "owner," a figure in charge of a particular domain (see Guaman Poma de Ayala

[1615] 1980). This latter variant persists as an intrusion into Peruvian Spanish in the form of *camayo*, a plantation boss (Malaret 1955).

This pivotal Andean concept of a sustaining prototype can help delineate crucial dimensions of Andean verbal expression. In these pages I propose to explore this possibility with reference to one particular Andean speech economy, that of the Sibundoy Indians, the Kamsa and Ingano, of Colombia's Sibundoy Valley. In particular, I will examine the issue of discourse authority, wherein speakers attempt to insure that their words are taken seriously, in the light of a Sibundoy belief in the exemplary character of their ancestral spirits. In the Sibundoy Valley, verbal instruments are critical to the handling of all community business, and discourse authority resides in gestures of adherence to the ancestral example. Thus speakers attempt in one way or another to connect their words with the ancestors. I will identify two specific strategies for accomplishing this move: one is *appropriate referencing*, whereby speakers exhibit knowledge that counts as legitimate and pertinent; the other is *experiential sampling*, whereby speakers create a virtual experience of ancestral presence. Each strategy is founded on the exemplary status of the ancestors; each facilitates discourse that is (to quote Salomon and Urioste 1991: 16) "a tangible instance of a vitalizing prototype," and these tactics thus fall within the larger Andean charter established in the Quechua root *camay*, signifying the action of endowing a physical entity with a sustaining life force.

## DISCOURSE AUTHORITY

All communicative systems entail problems of authority, in the root sense of assessing the point of origin as well as the derivative sense of accounting for levels of force with respect to messages conveyed. Verbal systems typically index some prior state of affairs in assigning discourse authority. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981: 342) notes that "the authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher." Claiming discourse authority involves making effective (making "organic," in Bakhtin's phrasing) this connection to a preexisting charter. What is at stake is the speaker's ability to link an audience to the operative social charter. Such claims may invoke the speaker's identity (as a sign of special access to the privileged material) or the speaker's positioning in relation to members of the audience. Regardless, the speaker will be expected to select the appro-

prate speech genre and observe the existing canons for verbal performance, which tend to be rigorously specified for the more formal modes of communication.

This model of speech authority countenances a productive tension between the established speech vehicles and the speaker's ambition to influence a particular audience. Although speech systems generally assign priority to certain social categories, rarely if ever can speech authority be guaranteed in advance on the basis of sheer social identity (see Yankah 1992). Instead, speakers must assert claims to discourse authority in a fluid, negotiable environment, and this circumstance brings performance elements of style and content onto center stage. In other words, in claiming authority by tracing one's words to the wisdom of the ancestors, speakers must demonstrate a command over rhetorical and expressive resources present in the local speech economy. Personal authority might open the door to discourse authority but rhetorical prowess is required if the speaker is to realize this opportunity.

The importance of rhetorical prowess in making authority claims derives in part from the enhanced poetic features of the speech genres dedicated to the representation of essential truths, widely reported in the ethnography of speaking literature (Fox 1988; Briggs 1988; Kuipers 1990; McDowell 1992). Pascal Boyer (1990) argues that truth in traditional discourse resides in two systemic features, the social position of the speaker and the degree of formalization in the speech. Concerning the speaker's identity, he notes that "only some actors in traditional interaction are supposed to make true statements about certain domains of reality" (1990: 105). Concerning the form of the message, Boyer (1990: 81) observes that "utterances are supposed to convey a truth not in spite of, but *because of*, their formalization...the more formalized the utterances, the more they are conceived of as containing some truth.

Joel Kuipers discusses the speech practices of the Indonesian Weyewa, where "the uses of quotations, couplets, and deixes are crucial to signalling how 'central' a performer thinks his performance is" (1992: 169). In this speech system, according to Kuipers (1992: 7), "the more 'iconic' or 'conventional' the verbal keying, the more the framed discourse is likely to be ritually authoritative, ancestral, and textualized." The speech forms of cosmovision characteristically evince high degrees of prosodic and grammatical patterning and a concentration of indirect modes of reference. Typically, they are prepared for over the course of

childhood verbal socialization, become active with the onset of adulthood, and reach their expressive maturity as the adult turns elder. Increasing familiarity with rhetorical conventions allows those in the know to formulate appropriate messages in the appropriate forms, to create improvised spoken texts that rehearse or rehabilitate the existing store of foundational texts.

In this light, the speaker's claim to discourse authority becomes an issue of linking the present discourse to some previous discourse; it becomes a struggle in intertextuality. The notion of *intertextual gap*, the perceived distance between a current text and its prototype, may prove useful here (see Briggs and Bauman 1992). In claiming discourse authority speakers attempt to minimize the perception of intertextual gap between their words and some faithful echoing of original text, so that their speech can be taken as consensual truths. The connection to the past is made "organic" through a convincing rendering of speech that is taken to be foundational.

The Sibudoy case is interesting here. I have suggested that Inga and Kamsa speakers assert discourse authority either by making reference to the ancestors or by actually evoking their presence. In the case of appropriate referencing, the speaker seeks to minimize the perception of intertextual gap by asserting a link to narrative tradition: as taita Bautista Juajibioy, one of the best of the Kamsa storytellers remarked, "I used to like to hear these things, since there were many of them, and the elders would be conversing among themselves, and oneself just listening to everything." Note that this strategy stakes a claim on mediated rather than virtual experience, to the words of those who are authorized to interpret the ancestors rather than to the words of the ancestors themselves. In providing experiential sampling, speakers create the illusion that it is the voices of the ancestors themselves we are hearing. This strategy follows the continuous thread of tradition to its source and plunges us directly into the heart of the ancestral world.

Strategies for claiming discourse authority typically involve a denial of intertextual gap by asserting fidelity to the relevant prototype or to recognized interpreters of it. These machinations are perhaps universal in the world's speech systems, but in the Andean context they readily evoke the semantic web captured in *camay* and its derivatives, the pervasive concept of a sustaining prototype that resonates within the tokens of contemporary experience. In this analysis, it is the reverbera-

tion of the prototype, accessed in virtual or in mediated form through the appropriate verbal gestures, that confers discourse authority on a stream of speech.

In taking up the Sibundoy materials in greater detail, I will explore two rather different sorts of authority claims made in the verbal performances of Sibundoy speakers. One is referential in nature and self-effacing in tone; it indexes the plane of human action and calls for divine blessing on its enterprises. The other is ecstatic in nature and self-aggrandizing in tone; it creates the illusion of divine presence, and operates as a cure within the plane of human-supernatural relations. Both techniques for claiming authority entail a common foundation of ancestral influence, and both are made effective through felicitous performance in the appropriate speech genres. After examining the discourses of blessing and cure, we will inspect mythic narrative storytelling which offers scope for each sort of authority claim.

We have noted that discourse authority in the Sibundoy Valley abides in the proper application of speech instruments designed to reference and evoke the ancestors. Elsewhere I have characterized the Sibundoy survival strategy, the plan for physical and cultural persistence, as revolving around two components, the blessing and the cure (McDowell 1990). I now propose that discourse authority in the Sibundoy Valley resides in the activation of one or both of these tactics, as speakers draw upon these acknowledged sources of common belief and practice in order to imbue their talk with the aura of collective weight. The different speech genres access these domains of potential authority in different ways, providing speakers with differential strategies for advancing the centrality of their statements.

## THE CEREMONIAL BLESSING

It is no exaggeration to state that juridical authority in the Sibundoy Valley is verbally constituted, through the filter of a ceremonial speech form that accomplishes all community business. Among the Kamsa this speech variety is known as *jongwamiyan*, "the speech of the cabildo," or *el lenguaje* or *el lenguaje ritual*, "the language" or "the ritual language." The Inganos refer to a similar verbal code as *aylastima* (Dover 1994). Among the Kamsa, mastery in this speech variety is a prerequisite to political office in the *cabildo*, the organ of community self-government,



where official business of the indigenous community is framed and partially conducted in ritual language discourse. But its presence is hardly restricted to this overtly political arena; the ability to create ceremonial speeches is vital to the assumption of adult roles within the indigenous community. As young men and women come of age, marry, have children, they must gain ability in this demanding verbal code in order to properly solicit and thank the patrons of rite of passage ceremonies such as marriage, baptism, confirmation, and first communion. The code of ceremonial speech even permeates more routine, conversational settings, as interlocutors draw upon its features (in attenuated form) to persuade, entreat, and honor.

The ceremonial speech form known as Kamsa ritual language is a linguistic code based on the Ramsa language but imposing a range of additional restrictions, in phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and prosody. Kamsa ritual language speeches feature ponderous words composed of Spanish roots encased in elaborate Kamsa inflections; these words are generally organized into parallel phrases, the phrases intoned rapidly in a chanting style that echoes the tonalities of Catholic prayer. These phrases invoke the Christian and indigenous ancestors and call upon them to bless the paltry business of subservient mortals.

Let's consider a particular instance, a minor recurrent speech event in the life of the Ramsa community. At *mingas* (collective labor parties), *agradecimientos* (feasts of thanks), and rites of passage ceremonies, heads of households supply ample quantities of food and drink to their guests. The celebration begins as the host dedicates the about-to-be-tapped barrel of fresh *chicha* (the infamous maize brew ubiquitous in the Andes) to some prestigious guest who becomes its owner (known as the *wawajona*). This individual incurs the responsibility (and the rights) to distribute the refreshment among those present at the occasion. The *wawajona* offers large containers filled to the brim with *chicha* to other distinguished persons attending the event; they in turn share their allotment, in smaller containers now, with the people around them. As the process continues, all present participate in a ritual of reciprocity, sometimes receiving *tutumas* (gourd bowls) of *chicha* with one hand even as they present a similar offering with the other. Hierarchy, abundance, and reciprocity are the featured messages in these disbursements of *chicha*, which is conceived in the Sibudoy Valley as the lubricant of social existence.

I reproduce here the text of a speech delivered in Kamsa by Justo Jacanamijoy, my gracious Sibundoy host, to a distinguished visitor after a November minga. I have arranged this speech into poetic lines marked by linguistic and performance factors, and placed beneath it a free translation into English. In the actual performance setting, the words of the host are interlaced with the words of the wawajona, and both individuals speak in the rapid, chanted tonalities appropriate to ritual language speech-making:

#### DEDICATION OF THE CHICHA BARREL

##### Host speaks:

*base bwatsendonatema atxebe mamajema*  
A small drop of chicha my poor little mother

*kwatenjabobuyishena wakinabe baria*  
Surely she has prepared it on my son's behalf

*ainan katjustepresko bweta pamillangastaka*  
My heart rejoices with so many kindred present

*trabajo tkobotsatxata*  
God's work we have given to you

*nyetxana metsenabxe* [5]  
Please drink as much as you like.

##### Barrel owner speaks:

*dios le pay despagracho dios le pay*  
May God reward you, thank you, may God reward you

*taita dios tojoremidia ndone wantadona*  
God Our Father provides so that we do not lack

*trabajo impado kbochjastsatxetay*  
God's work we will also someday offer to you

The spirit of the message is conveyed in the very first line: "a small drop of chicha." This "small drop" is in reality an enormous dousing, an immersion in a river of chicha that is likely to flow through the night and well into the next day. In the Sibundoy Valley as elsewhere in the Andes,

chicha is revered as the fluid of social life; as don Justo once expressed it to me, "Where there is chicha there is love." To refer to this vast quantity of chicha about to be unleashed on the party-goers as "a drop" is to activate the expressive code of Kamsá ceremonialism, with its emphasis on modesty, delicacy, and understatement.

If we assess the claims to authority voiced in ritual language speeches, we find that the speaker brings forward an image of community defined as an idealized extended family, and locates himself or herself in the center of this ideological construction. Speakers advance this notion by confining all personal reference and address in these speeches to a small set of fictive kinship terms. The dedication speech uses the terms *mama* and *wakiña* figuratively to refer to the women who made the chicha and the young man who is to be honored as owner of the barrel; the speaker also mentions *pamillanga* (line 3), a word that depicts the Kamsá community as an extended family.

The claim to authority in ritual language speeches involves the invocation of exemplary ancestors, as in this common formula of ceremonial speech:

*chabe mundo, chabe lware, tsiyetsashekwasiona*  
In His world, in His place,  
I am following in the footsteps of the ancestors.

The speaker's virtue is defined by a humble recognition of the grand scheme of things, a knowing of one's place within the cosmos. The speeches at hand do not include this formula, but the speakers repeatedly credit God (and implicitly, the ancestors) for the good things in life: notably the chicha they are about to sample. Chicha is referenced indirectly by the Spanish loan word *trabajo*, which I have translated as "God's work," but the broader implication is of an object laden with cosmic significance, an object that is *camasca*, if you like. The barrel owner makes this claim explicit in line 7: "God Our Father provides so that we do not lack." But God Our Father is synthesized in Sibudoy thought with *ngabe taita*, Our Father the Sun, and should be taken as a cover for the formative elements of the Kamsá ethos.

Kamsá ritual language speeches propose a civilization secured by the Christian deities who watch over all that happens, and indigenous ancestors who first wrested a spiritually safe enclave from the powerful

forces that presided in the early stages of cosmic history (see McDowell 1989, 1994). Contemporary people are best protected against the continuing presence of these disruptive forces by adherence to the model of the ancestors. Ritual language speeches present all modern scenes as pale reflections of their ancestral templates. Discourse authority is achieved through the paradox of self-effacement in the midst of a virtuosic verbal performance. The ceremonial speeches activate a world configured according to the example of the ancestors; they assert the primacy of the ancestral model, and emphasize the derivative character of all subsequent events.

These speeches implore the continuing assistance of the ancestors but stop short of asserting ancestral presence, even though it is thought that the ancestors are listening in with approval. Here the barrel owner references the deity, "May God reward you, my thanks, may God reward you," but makes no move to evoke the deity's presence. The dedication of the chicha barrel reveals in slightly muted form the tendencies towards acoustic patterning, towards syntactic parallelism, and towards figurative reference that characterize the ritual language speeches generally. Another claim to authority is implicitly lodged in the speaker's ability to improvise discourse in this highly demanding verbal form. One asserts the priority of the ancestors, while simultaneously demonstrating extraordinary fluency in the required speech code.

## SINGING TO THE SPIRITS

The blessing operates in the political arena of Sibundoy civilization, both the overtly political and the personal-as-political; its counterpart in the spiritual realm is the cure. Curing is effected through the intervention of native doctors who use verbal and other resources to encourage a change in the underlying structures of human fate. The practice of the native doctor requires a knowledge of the traditional remedies, especially *huasca* (an organic form of LSD) and *borrachera*, distilled from the fronds of the *datura* tree. Both remedies produce psychotropic effects, relatively mild ones in the case of *huasca*, more severe ones in the case of *borrachera*. *Huasca* is utilized as a spiritual tonic on a regular basis; *borrachera* is employed only in instances of powerful sorcery (Bristol 1968; Taussig 1987).

The benevolent work of the native doctor is the cure which is thought to make people strong so that they will enjoy the insulating effects of spiritual health. The native doctors are known in Spanish as *medicos*, but the Ingano name for them is more revealing: *sinchi*, "strong," from the essence of their practice, *sinchiyachi*, "to make strong." Native doctors are recruited to strengthen people against the perpetual threat of spirit sickness. *huayra* (Ingano), *binyea* (Kamsá), each term meaning "wind" initially and "spirit sickness" by extension. *Huayra* can be contracted from exposure to either the souls of the departed or to the spirit forces of the forest or wilderness. People who experience these encounters will suffer from deteriorating health or devastating accidents unless their spiritual condition is improved through the intervention of the native doctors.

Sibundoy native doctors have been renowned for centuries in this swath of the Andes (Salomon 1983), and they continue to enjoy a fine reputation for their curing prowess. Their practice is heavily influenced by lowland spirituality, for the Sibundoy Valley is transitional between the Andes and the adjacent Amazonian basin. Both Frank Salomon (1986) and Michael Taussig (1987) have noted the remarkable complementarity of highland and lowland cultures at this latitude of the Andes. Most Sibundoy *medicos* spend some time in informal apprenticeship to a lowland doctor; in this capacity they learn the cultivation and preparation of *huasca*, the medicine vine, and they refine their mastery over the ritual actions that define their practice. Foremost among these are the vocal and acoustic performances that effect the necessary communication with the spirit realm. These shamanic performances include chanting, whistling, humming, ritual blowing, and the percussive use of the curing branches. The verbal component is termed *taqingapa* in Inga, which translates as "singing to the spirits" (Levinsohn 1976).

The verbal portions of these performances make authority claims, and contrary to the situation described for ceremonial speeches, the claims launched by the native doctors are personalized by explicit allegations of individual prowess. The framework of an ancestral charter remains constant, but the posture of the speaker is effectively inverted. Instead of proclaiming the assimilation of self to a collective order, the native doctor asserts his remarkable talent achieved through an impressive lineage connecting him with the very roots of spiritual power. A

standard formula in these chants invokes the original source of medicinal power, the jaguar:

*nuca tigremanda* "I am from the jaguar".

The Christian overlay is activated through references to San Cipriano, formerly a magician, and thus associated with transformative powers in folk Catholicism, and the wise Solomon of the Old Testament. Some authority claims stand virtually as genealogies. Consider three claims advanced in a chant by Domingo Mojomboy, as transcribed in Inga by Stephen Levinsohn (1976: 109):

(1)

*cunahora nucallatatami rimacuni*

*sinchi tigrepá huahua*

Now I myself am speaking

child of the curing jaguar.

(2)

*nuca canimi uiyarisca patricio piñapa huahua*

I am feeling the spirit presence of Patricio Piña.

(3)

*yachucusami cani chasallata*

*imasa nuca huanuq taita taquidor*

*imasa ambi upiaspa bailador*

*imasa rondadorhua bailador*

*imasa plumacunahua bailador*

I learned just the same,

how my late father used to chant,

how he used to dance, drinking the medicine,

how he used to dance with the panpipes,

how he used to dance with the feathers.

The first segment cites an ultimate source of spiritual power, the jaguar, an animal closely associated with spiritual practice throughout the northwestern Amazon and its surrounds (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975). The performer then goes on to mention a powerful lowland doctor, Patricio Piña. The third portion shows the continuation of the stream of spiritual prowess through the singer's father and at last into his own competence. This chant establishes a lineage from the source to the

present that includes a renowned lowland doctor and the speaker's father as intermediary points in an unbroken chain of spiritual power:

jaguar  
    lowland medico  
        speaker's father  
            speaker

As in the ceremonial speeches, it is the ancestors who underwrite these authority claims, for the mythic narratives tell how the spiritual knowledge of the heathen savages (aucas in Inga; yemba in Kamsa) was appropriated in ancestral times when the first Sibundoy took the feathers from the vanquished heathen, and thereby acquired the knowledge that was in the heathen's mind. The myths go on to relate that these first people became very powerful doctors; among their feats was the ability to raise the dead back to life, and the ability to take the form of jaguars or bears and in these guises wander the world.

It is interesting to note the verbal and rhetorical flourishes that contribute to a perception of authenticity in these chants. The phrases are marked with the affirmative suffix, *-mi*, which stands in opposition to the reportative suffix, *-si*, and thereby assert a personal assurance of the veracity of the articulated propositions. Moreover, the performer elects to draw a fairly elaborate portrait of the native doctor's practice, and thereby signal his familiarity with such esoteric associations as the link between feathers, music-making, and dancing in the lore of traditional indigenous medicine. Finally, the performer must be able to reproduce the acoustic effects, the rhythms and melodies, that facilitate communication with the spirit realm. It is worth noting here that this "singing to the spirits" is thought to accomplish a direct encounter with the spirits, whose presence is strongly felt under the psychotropic effects of the traditional remedies. In essence, the native doctor becomes a spiritual actor in the arena of Sibundoy ancestral spirits, and his patients experience vicariously the presence of these ancestors.

## **SIBUNDOY MYTHIC NARRATIVE**

The mythic narrative tradition is carried forward by elderly Sibundoy men and women who depict the times and doings of *flugpaman-dacuna*, the first people. This body of narrative contains the collective memory concerning the ancestors and their exemplary actions at the

dawn of human civilization. As people gather around the hearth in the cool evenings, or during lively *chicha* parties after a minga, a labor expedition, these stories of ancestral times are performed. Here is the text of one mythic narrative, "The Tale of the Red Dwarfs" as narrated in Kamsa by taita Mariano Chicunque (this text and other Kamsa mythic narratives mentioned in the discussion are taken from McDowell 1994):

### THE RED DWARFS

*shatxemungabiana mntxá*

The story about the red dwarfs goes like this.

*bueno ntixamosa inetsomananuna*

Well, just what were they?

*ana mwentxna aixebe barina nye kofitsekwentangu nye nyetxá*

So here for my part they have only told about it just like this.

*serto taita kompadre tekwanabwatemana benito muchjavisoy katatoy  
jtanjema biska waxebwand*

Truly, Father Compadre, did you know Benito Muchjavisoy, blind in both eyes, with a large swollen throat?

*tateko jinye o ndoñe bndinye ko tangwakna*

Lord, have you seen or haven't you seen that old man?

[5]

*katatoika jiana benito muchjavisoy wabaina*

Blind in both eyes, Benito Muchjavisoy he is called.

*ch xjuftseparla ana ana shatxemiungaka shatxemienga imenámena*

He told me about, about the red dwarfs, red dwarfs they were.

*anteona mwentxe innotajtsayenaka shatxumiengaka*

In the old days here they lived under the hills, the red dwarfs.

*bueno ana mntxá orasiona tojitsemena i basengu chnga shatxemingena*

Well, so like that at prayer time they would come out, and they were small those red dwarfs.

*btsetsanga basese tangwagenga base welabenga*

the adults were small, little old men, small old witches.

[10]



*chká jaboknana a chbe chká jutsobjajandn jutsobjajanán*  
Like that they would appear, those ones, like that they would gesture,  
they would gesture.

*nye tkjobekona choye nakanye tkjwinye chbe*  
Just go near them there, just look at them,

*nye kacha ntxam txa txa txa txa ch kukwatxaka mntxá*  
just with that "txa txa txa txa", their hands like this,

*i con electricidad ndayujungase imenamena*  
and with electricity, just what were they?

*choye jobekonana iye ajá kwevushe ntxamse inamenana* [15]  
There they would come around, and aha, in caves, what were they?

*choye imenoyenunga chngana chjungena imenoyena*  
There they lived, those guys, those creatures lived,

*iye choye mabo mabo ko biyajungesa imenamena chbenga*  
*ch shatxemunga*  
And there: "Come here, come here," they were able to speak, those  
guys, the red dwarfs.

*iye ch tkjobekona nye mo che jutsefchanan*  
And if you approached, they would just laugh there.

*nye batxa bekontskone iye anye jatsshajayana ko nye obanaka*  
But if they came a little closer they fell dead there.

*chká inobanaye nyetxá binyea bomenunga*  
Like that they had a very evil wind.

*chnga ch shatxemiunga imenáména chkajunga imenáména*  
They, those red dwarfs they were, that's how they were,

*a nye chká nye chka ajá*  
just like that, just like that, aha.

*bweno ana shatjoye ndoñe benache yendemuna*  
Well, so there was no trail to Mocoa in those days,

*del todo ndoknoye benache yendemuna*  
there were no trails anywhere at all.

*nye mwentxa chká chká nderado yentxangena ana kwakjonaye* [25]  
Only here like that, like that, truly people went by way of Kwakjonaye,

*chjansa kwenachenungwana*  
over there was the passage.

*ch mora ch herradura ndayá ch chiñe atxena tijufisinye*  
Now there is that stone road, that one I have seen myself.

*serta ook ena ngutsiangusha nye ena ngutsiangusha betiyebjunja chu-  
xe kwanamana* Truly, oh, pure reeds, nothing but reeds, some trees, tho-  
se are over there.

*atxe basajema orna tijoftserepara ch ena limpia i mas chkoyina .  
matseyeká*  
When I was a child I saw that whole place and further along  
to Matseye,

*kwanabaina matseyoka ch batsjaka* [30]  
it is called Matseye, a stream with high banks on each side.

*more ch mameta ch fátema indokolokando choka*  
Now a Virgin, the Virgin of Fátima, is there.

*chiñe bayiñe ana bayiñe inamena*  
By there an evil point, so, an evil point, it was.

*ana ch shatxemunga chenache chká inenáména imenoyiyena*  
And those red dwarfs, there like that they were, they lived.

*ana chká ch orasiona ana nye chká ana lo mismo*  
So like that at the prayer hour, just the same thing.

*ana tangwanga imojatstudia a ver ndayeka chjunga nyetxá* [35]  
So the old ones thought about it: "Let's see, what can we do about the-  
se guys?

*i chká chungá a vera ntxamo montjaobrana*  
So like that, let's see, what should we do about it?"

*ana shatjoya ndoñe imondajna*  
So they couldn't go to Mocoa.

*ana tondaye mase remedio kamwentxe utxena tijofisinyena*  
So there is no other remedy, right here I have seen it.

*kekabwatama ch entsentsiyexeka wabaina niñuxu*  
Do YOU know it? The incense-tree it is called, a tree.

*i bweno yojataband btska chká jatsetxana jatsetxana* [40]  
And fine, they gathered a lot of it, they cut some and they cut some more.

*i chiñe ch tsixiyana tsixiyana*  
And that one brings tears, it brings tears to the eyes.

*i chana yojatoband iye i chana jwakoñe joyambana*  
And they gathered it and placed it in a large cauldron.

*i ana chubjungena por ejemplo ch kwevove chká oyenunga*  
And those guys thus lived in those caves like that.

*yibeta jana i chentxa jetsajajwane che entsentsiyuxu*  
At dusk they went and there they placed that incense-wood by the door,

*i bisetsá ena jomaxe nyetemaka jetsajajwana* [45]  
And they placed a lot of carbon and some small kindling by the door.

*i ch tojtsungetxana impase i chnga katamunjana*  
And they smelled that and sure enough they were dying.

*yajontá jtsayetanana entsentsiyuxeka jtsayetanana*  
They began to kill them with that incense-wood, they killed them.

*i chiñe bwetaña katunjanopodia jayetanana achká kulta ch bnga tangwanga*  
And they killed as many as they could with it, so wise were our elders.

*krischanga chká are bngana anteona ndwabainungasa ch tangwanga*  
Like that our ancestors were not Christians, those elders were not baptised.

*yojowenana ndwabainungaka* [50]  
They understood even though they weren't baptised.

*ana seria nye ch jajoka nombre tatanga ch tatanga chká podeska kon-  
yebenabayana imenamena*  
So truly those garden names like Tatanga, Tatanga, like that they  
would give each other nicknames.

*iye pero chká imojajastudiana ana ch katamunjanenobowiyana*  
But like that they thought about it and they were able to defend  
themselves.

*pero ch kwakjonaye choye chká katumunjoftiseobra ch ana chiñe  
ch katuntsanayetananga*  
But by Kwakjonaye, there like that they worked it and so they finished  
them off.

*ah chinsa baiñe wabainife*  
Ah, that evil point as we call it.

*i chana chana komena* [55]  
And that, that is the story.

*pero ya tijatsekwentana komo kofisekwentanga*  
But now I have told it to you as they told it to me.

*bueno allí no mas es corto*  
Well, that's all there is, it is a short one.

*ese es del shatxume*  
That's the one about the red dwarf.

Before turning to the content and its presentation in this narrative, we should take note of two preliminary features: the use of ceremonial speech forms to frame narrative performances as blessed moments in the life of the community, and the overt process of attribution to the stream of narrative tradition. There are hints of ceremonial speech in the opening and closing gambits of this performance, where the narrator argues explicitly for a displacement of authority from self. In what we might call a prologue and an epilogue, taita Mariano stresses the derivation of his material from a continuous fount of narrative tradition:

*ana mwentxna atxebe barina nye koftsekwentanga nye nyetxá*  
So here for my part they have only told about it just like this.

*pero ya tijatsekwentana komo koftsekwentanga*  
But now I have told it to you as they told it to me.

In the extended prologue, taita Mariano is more explicit about his source for this particular narrative:

*serto taita kompadre tekwanabwatemana benito muchjaviso y katatoy*  
*jtanjema btska waxebwana*  
Truly, Father Compadre, did you know Benito Muchjaviso y, blind in both eyes, with a large swollen throat?

*tuteko jinye o ndone bndinye ko tangwakna*  
Lord, have you seen or haven't you seen that old man?

*katatoika jtana benito muchjaviso y wabaina*  
Blind in both eyes, Benito Muchjaviso y he is called.

*ch xjuftseparla ana ana shatxemiungaka shatxemienga imendmena*  
He told me about, about the red dwarfs, red dwarfs they were.

Some performances, especially those taking place in the presence of several elders, evince even greater attention to what Erving Goffman (1981) calls the "ritual constraints" on talk. In such settings, narrators close with brief ceremonial flourishes:

*chkuse atxena tsatsaxumbo nyetxá xmopasentsia*  
Just like that I know the story, please forgive me.

*nyetxana tijenoyebwe i respeto tijenoperdey*  
I have told it all without losing respect.

Ceremonial speakers normally seek pardon for any possible sense of personal trespass, and they routinely affirm their respect for the traditional procedures derived from ancestral example. These same elements are brought into narrative performances to secure the blessing for this particular form of human action. Turning now to the content of "The Tale of the Red Dwarfs," it is palpable that Taita Mariano faces a particular dilemma in accomplishing this narrative: he must make cred-

ible a tale that has puzzling, even counterfactual elements in it. He struggles against his own incredulity, anticipating that of his listeners:

*i con electricidad ndayujungase imenamena*  
and with electricity, just what were they?

Just what were they? The Sibundoy mythic narrative corpus has many moments of self-doubt, if we may call it that, when narrators voice concern about remarkable details. This same narrator, for example, stumbles over an episode of sexual explicitness in another mythic narrative, escaping by scolding the elders for being naughty:

*y asna anteona opunga imanamena*  
and then in the old days they were naughty  
("Wangetsmuna" taita Mariano Chicunque, line 90)

In such cases it is necessary to stress the difference in values in order to preserve the attribution of the tale to the elders. In reference to the red dwarfs, taita Mariano brings forward a comparison to a modern wonder, electricity, to provide some notion of the curious effects produced by these odd little creatures. What then is the attitude conveyed in these evocations of the elders? The stance of the mythic narrative tradition towards the elders is expressed clearly in lines 48-52 of "The Red Dwarfs":

*i chife bwetaña katunjanopodia jayetanana achká kuka ch bnga tangwanga*  
And they killed as many as they could with it, so wise were our elders.

*krischanga chká are bngana anteona ndwabainungasa ch tangwanga*  
Like that our ancestors were not Christians, those elders were not baptised,

*yojowenana ndwabainungaka*  
They understood even though they weren't baptised.

*ana serta nye ch jajoka nombre tatanga ch tatanga chká podeska konyebenabayana imenamena*  
So truly those garden names like Tatanga, Tatanga, like that they would give each other nicknames.

*iyé pero chká imojajastudiana ana ch katamunjanenobowiyana*  
 But like that they thought about it and they were able to defend  
 themselves.

"So wise were our elders!" The tone is one of admiration for the resourcefulness of the elders, who could triumph over these formidable adversaries in spite of their lack of modern education. The narrator exclaims, "They understood even though they weren't baptized," thereby qualifying the whole project of Christianization in the Sibundoy Valley.

But attribution to the elders as an impeccable source is not the only authority claim made in this narrative. Since the world as we know it derives from this earlier world, there are points of conjunction between the old days and these days that bespeak the actions of the ancestors. Taita Mariano provides first-hand testimony concerning archaic elements that he experienced but that are no longer in evidence:

*ch mora ch herradura ndayá ch chíñe atxena tijuftsinye*  
 Now there is that stone road, that one I have seen myself.

Through this gesture taita Mariano establishes himself as ancestor-like; he too is a witness of an earlier state of affairs. Throughout the corpus of Sibundoy mythic narrative I detect this partial assimilation of the narrator to the narrative, as those who describe the ancestors suggest lines of continuity between themselves and the ancestors. The storytellers, like the elders and ancestors, are contributing to the Sibundoy project of civilization. One final component of authority resides in the narrator's attempts to dramatize the story, and thereby create in the audience a virtual experience of the story line. To the extent that the audience members are brought into this mediated but evocative contact with the protagonists of the tale, they will experience the story as palpable and real. Taita Mariano makes ample use of both direct and indirect methods for evoking this experience of narrative epiphany, wherein the narrative design dissolves into the narrative material itself (McDowell 1983). An indirect technique is the manifestation of emotional arousal on the part of the narrator, who appears to be living the experience he relates. Consider line 28 of "The Red Dwarfs":

*serta ooh ena ngutsiangusha nye ena ngutsiangusha betiyebjunja chu-*  
*xe kwanamna*  
 Truly, oh, pure reeds, nothing but reeds, some trees, those are over there.

Here the narrator's interjection, "ooh," provides a gauge to the emotional valency of this desolate spot. It draws the audience into an affective relationship with the story; the storyteller models and instigates a pattern of emotional response to the unfolding narrative. This emotional involvement is furthered by another epiphanous device, the use of direct quotation. Taita Mariano quotes the red dwarfs, with their odd vocalizations, "txa txa txa," and their crackly verbal summons. "Come here, come here" (lines 13 and 17). He mimics them, capturing their beckoning hand gestures with his own. He also quotes the elders as they contemplate the problem posed by these creatures:

ana tangwanga imojaistudia a ver ndayeka chjunga nyetxá  
So the old ones thought about it: "Let's see, what can we do about these guys?"

As we hear taita Mariano speak the words spoken by the elders at that moment in the sequence of events, we provisionally enter into the framework of the narrative and experience it vicariously not in the role of audience but as witness. All of these devices -the framing of narration with ritual language, the identification of sources (the elders and ancestors), the insertion of personal reminiscence, and the dramatization of the plot- contribute to the efficacy of the performance. Discourse authority in Sibundoy mythic narrative resides in the way the story is conveyed as much as in explicit authority claims. The ceremonial framework places the narrating event squarely within the orbit of proper collective effort; it procures the blessing for this particular instance of social collaboration. Attribution of the tale to specific and generic predecessors activates the appropriate frame of reference, the formative period of the ancestors. Insertion of personal recollection makes a link between this remote past, a past within living experience, and the present. Finally, narrative epiphany gives the tale an emotional resonance that by-passes purely rational estimations of veracity.

## CONCLUSION

The discourses of blessing and cure equally invoke the ancestral standard. But the doctors' chants stress a more individualized purchase on this ancestral foundation: they are cocky where the ceremonial speeches are self-effacing. Two different personas are manifest in these contrastive verbal genres, corresponding to the different missions of



blessing and cure. The blessing, as we have seen, operates in the social arena as a means of constantly renewing the social contract. Its mission is to subsume a host of potential cleavages into an all-encompassing collective whole. Elsewhere I have labelled this mission as community-building (McDowell 1990). The cure, on the other hand, takes us into the combative arena of supernatural intrigue, where the native doctor enters into a cosmic skirmish on behalf of his ailing or vulnerable client. The discourse of these spiritual warriors is as assertive, even aggressive, as the ceremonial discourse is conciliatory.

In spite of this contrast in tonality, both verbal performances trace a link between the primordial charter and contemporary practice. And both require of the performer a high degree of verbal sophistication. Each verbal genre presupposes an out-of-the-ordinary way with language, and the ability to produce the appropriate verbal instruments, instruments carefully crafted for their referential and acoustic properties, makes effective the particular authority claims advanced in these discourses. Through the felicitous use of verbal conventions, speakers achieve a resonance of the prototype in the speaking voice.

Key elements of both blessing and cure can be traced in mythic narrative performances. The blessing that opens many narrative sessions, with its modeling of appropriate behavior, affirms these stories as a proper social activity. Telling these stories and hearing them told signifies participation in the grand scheme of Sibundoy civilization. Preserving and disseminating this knowledge contributes to "following in the footsteps of the ancestors," to adherence to the timeless charter established in the ancestral period. At the same time, the experience of narrative epiphany, the experience of ancestral presence, recapitulates in attenuated form the ecstatic tactics of the cure. By adding experiential sampling to the dominant narrative mode of referencing, storytellers enhance the drama and impact of their tales and in the process enhance their claims to discourse authority.

Discourse authority in the Sibundoy Valley derives from the Sibundoy conceptualization of cosmic history, which originates with the powerful stratum of ancestors and culminates in the project of Sibundoy civilization. Effective locution in the Sibundoy Valley, especially in the speech genres tied to Sibundoy cosmology, is: *camasca*, a tangible instance of a sustaining prototype. It is the job of the speaker to revive the prototype, to make it resonate in the speech. Two prominent strategies

have been discussed here: those that reference and celebrate this layer of exemplary ancestors and those that move beyond reference towards epiphany, that is, towards direct experience of the ancestors.

Perhaps all speech about the cosmos evinces some mix of the two strategies, as speakers draw upon the common heritage to gather authority for their own discourses. Such claims to discourse authority abide within the larger Andean principle of *camasca*, the resonance of a formative past in our experience of the present. We have seen how Sibundoy speakers attempt to actualize this trans-temporal link by referencing or evoking the ancestors. Each method involves a denial of intertextual gap, or viewed from another angle, an assertion of intertextual identification. Appropriate referencing takes as its point of departure the canon of authorized knowledge about the ancestors, as carried principally in the stories told by the elders, and asserts or implies a continuity between this tradition and the speaker's words. Referencing therefore proposes explicitly a mediated identification with the source. Experiential sampling makes a stronger gesture, fashioning the illusion of identity between the vocalizations of the speaker and those of the ancestors. When brought together in the compass of situated verbal performances, these strategies convey an intense involvement in the local ethos, an involvement that argues for the centrality of the speaker's words.

What can be said, at last, about the saliency of verbal instruments of cosmology in the Andes? The Sibundoy case indicates a vital role for verbalization in the conduct of community business, in the perpetuation of traditional wisdom, in the management of spiritual relations. Access to social and political power in the community depends in part on one's ability to perform effectively in the cosmos-rendering speech genres. The Sibundoy data depict a world that is constituted and managed through verbal means, a universe infused with the power of speech. But the Sibundoy Valley, lying at the eastern fringe of the Andean highlands, has long been a crossroads linking highland and lowland peoples and cultures, as have many or most sites of Andean civilization (Flores-Ochoa 1979; Bastien 1978; Urton 1981). It could be argued that the centrality of speech in Sibundoy society reflects the infusion of lowland cultural elements, such as the ecstatic shamanism of the Sibundoy native doctors.

But this position ignores the generalized importance in the Andes of speech that is *camasca*, laden with cosmic resonance; it ignores the precedent of culture genesis through verbal action, attested in core Andean ethnohistory as well as in peripheral Andean sites like Colombia's Sibundoy Valley. I believe that the evidence calls for a revision of the thesis that verbal instruments are of secondary importance in Andean settings. I suspect that a careful inspection of virtually any Andean society will reveal patterns not dissimilar to those we have encountered in the Sibundoy Valley, where speakers claim discourse authority through invoking the example or influence of the ancestors, or by actually evoking ancestral presence.

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